

Mike Myers misses Hindus' funny bone

RON BANERJEE

Love Guru featuring Torontonians Mike Myers as a Hindu "guru" helping a Toronto Maple Leaf player find romantic love debuts tomorrow in theatres.

While there is little doubt the Leafs need help scoring, the movie is troubling because it takes certain liberties with Hindus that may not have been taken with other faith groups.

The publication of Mohammad cartoons by an obscure Danish newspaper provoked an orgy of global Islamic violence, including several deaths and embassy burnings.

Would Paramount Pictures dare to release a film mocking Islam? There seems to be a double standard in play here.

Hindus in particular have been victims of much hate and stereotyping in Canada.

In 2004, the Toronto Star, which makes a living by exalting every other minority, chose to publish a nude picture of Hindu goddess Durga. After demonstrations and a threatened hunger strike, the paper grudgingly published a half-hearted apology.

In 2005, the AIDS Committee of Toronto held a fundraiser "Fashion Cares," which featured city-wide ads of scantily-clad models dressed as Hindu goddesses in eroticized poses.

To their credit, ACT apologized and pulled some ads when requested. A Toronto Star columnist, however, published a screed accusing Hindu leaders of homophobia.

The western artistic community has also rewarded Hindu film-makers who created movies which unfairly stereotype the religion. Toronto director Deepa Mehta was feted for her movie Water, telling a fictional story of widows in the Hindu holy city of Vrindaban being sexually abused, and turning to lesbian relationships to cope.

The real issue with Mehta's film, and to some extent Love Guru, is one of context. Not realizing that Hindu society venerates elders, and that lesbianism is almost non-existent in India, Canadians may actually believe Mehta's fictional nonsense.

There is a difference between Mehta's "serious" film, versus Myers' madcap adventures in Love Guru.

Nevertheless, lack of context is troubling. Canadians have little real knowledge about Hindus, who are often unfairly lumped in with Sikhs and Muslims as South Asians.

Problems with spousal abuse, terrorism and poverty may affect other communities, but Hindus constitute the wealthiest community in America and face less of these challenges.

Hindu capabilities in Canada can be seen by the unveiling of the spectacular BAPS temple last summer, constructed at a cost of \$20 million with zero public funding.

TEMPLE LEADERS BLAMED

Hindu temple leaders are responsible for the community's bad image. Being less politically organized, this relatively passive group is reluctant to make waves in their adopted homeland. Many Hindu temple staff masquerade as leaders, yet do little to raise awareness of Hindu achievements or defend Hindu interests.

Real violence and hate afflict Canadian Hindus. After 9/11, a Hamilton Hindu temple was burned down, while police presence prevented major attacks on Muslim mosques.

The lack of Hindu political clout was further demonstrated last year when the McGuinty government turned down applications for funding to rebuild, stating the government does not fund religious projects.

But the same government extended funding to a variety of Muslim and Sikh religious groups without proper paperwork or oversight.

This isn't just another easily-aggrieved ethnic group whining about imagined slights. If all religions were treated equally, one could accept the slights as a normal part of living in a free democracy.

But in Canada, ethnic minorities are treated differently according to how much noise they make. This is unfortunate, but it is a reality Canadian Hindus should understand so they are not treated like third-class citizens in their own country.

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